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ABSTRACT

The Diversified Education through Leadership, Technology, and Academics (DELTA) program of the Austin Independent School District (AISD), Texas, serves students at each of the AISD 10 regular high schools. The goal of this open-entry, open-exit, competency-based diploma program is to recover former dropouts and to prevent students at risk of dropping out from doing so. Instruction in the program is individualized and self-paced, but is aligned with the district's regular curriculum. The DELTA program served 1,711 students during the 1998-99 school year, representing a 5% increase over the preceding year. In 1998-99, 1,399 students took the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills test for the first time. Mastery rates for DELTA students in reading and mathematics have increased over 3 years, with DELTA students approaching state averages in reading and writing, and surpassing state averages in mathematics. Evaluation findings indicate that the DELTA program is successfully meeting the goals of serving the target population and keeping students in school. Recommendations are made for program continuation. (SLD)

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FEEDBACK

Austin Independent School District

September 1999 Pub. No. 98.12

Delta Program Fourth-Year Implementation

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FEEDBACK

DELTA PROGRAM
FOURTH-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION

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PROGRAM HISTORY

In the spring of 1995, Austin ISD originally piloted NovaNET, a computer-based education system, at W.R. Robbins High School. The next fall, NovaNET was combined with district curriculum through the Diversified Education through Leadership, Technology, and Academics (DELTA) program, and each of the ten Austin high schools implemented the program. Currently, the DELTA program serves students at each of the ten regular high schools. The goal of this open-entry, open-exit, competency-based diploma program remains to recover former dropouts and to prevent students who are at risk of dropping out from doing so. Instruction in the program is individualized and self-paced. During the 1997-98 school year, lab schedules were varied for each campus to accommodate as many students as possible. During the 1998-99 school year, the DELTA curriculum was aligned with the district's curriculum framework. Under this framework, students may earn course credit based on a full year's course average rather than a semester average.

STUDENTS SERVED

The DELTA program served 1,711 students during the 1998-99 school year. This represents a 5% increase over the previous year. Eighteen students participated in the DELTA program at multiple high school campuses. As a result, the sum of campus enrollments is greater than the total number of students served district-wide. It should also be noted that the campuses submitted erroneous student identification numbers for 8 (<1%) students. Therefore, a slight imprecision exists in the numbers and percentages of students served. Table 1 contains demographic data for DELTA students by gender and ethnicity. The program has served relatively equal proportions of male and female students over the past three years. Likewise, the proportion of students served in each ethnic group has remained virtually unchanged over the same period.

Table 1: Number and Percentage for Gender and Ethnicity of Students Served, 1996-97-1998-99

Year	Male	Female	African-American	Native American	White/ Other	Asian	Hispanic
1998-99	862	849	352	5	544	37	773
	(50%)	(50%)	(20%)	(.3%)	(31%)	(2%)	(45%)
1997-98	858	766	317	6	508	32	761
	(53%)	(47%)	(20%)	(.3%)	(31%)	(2%)	(47%)
1996-97	735	783	348	4	479	20	667
	(48%)	(52%)	(23%)	(.2%)	(32%)	(1%)	(43%)

Table 2 presents additional demographic data on the population served. In 1997-98, nearly half of students served (49%) were seniors; this percentage decreased slightly to 45% for 1998-99. As shown in the table, over the program's last three years of operation, more than half

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of the students served were overage for grade, and approximately one-third were from low-income families (i.e., participating in free or reduced-price lunch program).

Table 2: Number and Percentage of Students Overage, LEP, Low Income, and Grade, 1996-99

Year	Overage	LEP	Low Income	9	10	11	12
1998-99	951 (55%)	51 (3%)	600 (35%)	273 (16%)	296 (17%)	351 (20%)	783 (45%)
1997-98	972 (60%)	66 (4%)	584 (36%)	299 (18%)	237 (15%)	297 (18%)	791 (49%)
1996-97	1,003 (66%)	46 (3%)	535 (35%)	254 (16%)	260 (17%)	296 (20%)	697 (46%)

Note: Totals by grade are as of the end of the school year. Due to reporting errors, 1998-99 totals do not match total number of students served.

Table 3 contains the total number and the percentage of students served by target population and by school for 1996-97 through 1998-99. The number of students served at each campus ranged from 74 to 349 in 1998-99. The total number of students served program-wide increased by 12% from 1996-97 to 1998-99. Of the 1,711 students enrolled in the DELTA program in 1998-99, 17% were former dropouts, and 70% were considered prevented dropouts.

Table 3: Total Number and Percentage of Total Students Served by Type and Campus, 1996-99

Campus	Number Served			Recovered Dropout			Prevented Dropout		
	96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99
Anderson	125	143	119	32 (26%)	36 (25%)	4 (3%)	79 (63%)	96 (67%)	130 (86%)
Austin	163	169	159	14 (9%)	14 (8%)	11 (6%)	139 (85%)	146 (86%)	128 (80%)
Bowie	183	259	348	48 (26%)	94 (36%)	56 (16%)	85 (46%)	144 (56%)	223 (64%)
Crockett	134	138	120	28 (21%)	16 (12%)	2 (1%)	44 (33%)	64 (46%)	59 (49%)
Johnston	106	83	88	49 (46%)	10 (12%)	4 (4%)	34 (32%)	52 (63%)	49 (55%)
Lanier	211	286	305	69 (33%)	89 (31%)	52 (17%)	139 (66%)	203 (71%)	253 (82%)
LBJ	104	55	74	42 (40%)	17 (30%)	14 (18%)	62 (60%)	39 (71%)	57 (77%)
McCallum	140	127	126	65 (46%)	58 (46%)	52 (41%)	63 (45%)	66 (52%)	71 (56%)
Reagan	204	139	159	76 (37%)	67 (48%)	56 (35%)	111 (54%)	79 (57%)	73 (45%)
Travis	148	225	231	42 (28%)	75 (33%)	38 (16%)	38 (26%)	187 (83%)	192 (83%)
TOTAL	1,518	1,624	1,711	465 (31%)	476 (29%)	289 (17%)	794 (52%)	1,076 (66%)	1208 (70%)

Note: Total of all students in 1998-99 is less than the sum of school totals because some students were enrolled at more than one school during the school year.

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In Table 4, the number of students served is repeated and the number (and average number) of credits earned, and the number (and percentage) of diplomas awarded to DELTA students by high school are presented.

Table 4: Number of Students Served, Total Number and Average Number of Credits Earned, and Number and Percentage of Graduates, 1996-99

Campus	Number Served			Credits Earned (Average Credits Earned)			High School Graduates		
	96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99
Anderson	125	143	119	234.5	251.5	308	41	51	32
				(1.9)	(1.8)	(2.6)	(33%)	(36%)	(26%)
Austin	163	169	159	105.5	250	162.5	31	65	56
				(.65)	(1.5)	(1.0)	(19%)	(38%)	(35%)
Bowie*	183	259	348	172	264	351.5	51	94	102
				(.94)	(1)	(1.0)	(28%)	(36%)	(29%)
Crockett	134	138	120	182	152	140.5	43	46	37
				(1.4)	(1.1)	(1.1)	(32%)	(33%)	(30%)
Johnston	106	83	88	28	36.5	14.5	10	22	22
				(.26)	(.4)	(.1)	(9%)	(27%)	(25%)
Lanier*	211	286	305	360	641.5**	659	84	110	95
				(1.7)	(2.2)	(2.1)	(40%)	(38%)	(31%)
LBJ	104	55	74	47.5	49	50.5	12	17	18
				(.46)	(.9)	(0.7)	(12%)	(31%)	(24%)
McCallum	140	127	126	234	792	690.5	34	67	76
				(1.7)	(6.2)	(5.4)	(24%)	(53%)	(60%)
Reagan*	204	139	159	190.5	201	137	66	55	43
				(.93)	(1.4)	(0.8)	(32%)	(40%)	(27%)
Travis*	148	225	231	123	143.5	167.5	31	41	43
				(.83)	(.6)	(0.7)	(21%)	(18%)	(18%)
TOTAL	1,518	1,624	1,711	1,677	2,781	2,681.5	403	568	523
				(1.1)	(1.7)	(1.5)	(27%)	(35%)	(30%)

Note: Total of all students in 1998-99 is less than the sum of school totals because some students were enrolled at more than one school during the school year.

* Schools offering evening classes.

** Credits for co-op courses included in this total.

The average number of credits earned per student decreased slightly from 1.7 credits in 1997-98 to 1.5 in 1998-99. This decrease was due in part to the program serving an increased number of seniors who needed fewer credits in order to graduate than underclassmen did (see Table 2). The number of graduates increased by 29%, from 403 to 523, during the past three years of program operation. For the third consecutive year, more than 25% of students served in the program graduated with a high school diploma. During the 1998-99 school year, more than 25% of DELTA program students graduated at eight of Austin's ISD's ten regular high schools.

Target Population

Table 5 reveals the number of students served, the total and average number of credits earned, and the number and percentage of high school diplomas awarded among the targeted population of recovered dropouts and prevented dropouts (at-risk students) only. As seen in

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Table 5, during each of the program years reported here, more than three-quarters of students served by the DELTA program were considered recovered or prevented dropouts. Although the number and proportion of recovered dropouts declined from 1997-98 to 1998-99, the number and proportion of prevented dropouts increased during this time period. Also, the number of students in the target population (recovered and prevented dropouts) declined somewhat from 1997-98 to 1998-99, and the proportion of the target population served declined during the same period. It should be noted that the 1998-99 school year represents the first full school year in which the district's alternative high school, Gonzalo Garza Independence High School (Garza), was in operation. It is possible that the decrease in proportion of the target population served by the DELTA program at the ten regular high schools may be attributable in part to more of those students being served by Garza.

Table 5: Enrollment, Percentage of Total Enrollment, Total and Average Credits Earned and Graduates by Target Population, 1996-99

Target Population	Number Served			Credits Earned			High School Graduates		
	96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99
Recovered Dropouts	465 (31%)	476 (29%)	289 (17%)	505 (1.1)	510.5 (1.1)	602.5 (2.0)	94 (20%)	112 (24%)	56 (19%)
Prevented Dropouts	794 (52%)	1,076 (66%)	1208 (70%)	961 (1.2)	1,012.5 (.9)	1894 (1.5)	218 (27%)	326 (30%)	307 (25%)
TOTAL	1,259 (83%)	1,552 (96%)	1497 (87%)	1,466 (1.2)	1,523 (1.0)	2,496.5 (1.6)	312 (25%)	438 (28%)	363 (24%)

Source: Campus DELTA Lab Teachers and district mainframe files.

Of the 289 recovered dropouts served during the 1998-99 school year, 56 (19%) received a high school diploma; 307 (25%) of the prevented dropouts served earned diplomas. Recovered dropouts earned an average of 2.0 credits while in the program. The number of prevented dropouts served by the program increased by more than 50% from 1996-97 to 1998-99 (from 794 to 1,224). The average number of credits earned by the target population increased from the previous year (from 1.0 credits per student to 1.6 credits per student).

Achievement Data

In 1996-97, 1,257 DELTA students took the exit-level Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). In 1997-98, 1,324 DELTA students took the test, and in 1998-99, 1,399 students took the TAAS test for the first time. Table 6 contains data on student mastery rates for first-time TAAS test-takers among DELTA students from 1996-97 to 1998-99. Mastery rates for each subtest are given by campus, by all district campuses, and by state.

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Table 6: Percent Achieving Mastery on TAAS Reading, Writing, and Math by School, 1996-99

Campus	Reading Mastery			Writing Mastery			Math Mastery		
	96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99
Anderson	74%	83%	73%	74%	86%	81%	58%	75%	62%
Austin	68%	81%	92%	68%	80%	85%	56%	74%	82%
Bowie	78%	90%	93%	73%	87%	90%	62%	80%	80%
Crockett	80%	88%	88%	76%	86%	86%	67%	71%	77%
Johnston	48%	91%	85%	51%	91%	85%	39%	75%	64%
Lanier	73%	83%	86%	72%	79%	86%	64%	74%	83%
LBJ	52%	90%	87%	59%	94%	79%	41%	77%	68%
McCallum	73%	82%	82%	75%	82%	87%	65%	71%	75%
Reagan	60%	82%	80%	63%	78%	81%	53%	70%	67%
Travis	59%	88%	78%	58%	86%	73%	39%	67%	64%
Total	67%	85%	86%	67%	84%	84%	55%	74%	75%

In Figures 1 through 3, exit-level TAAS mastery rates for DELTA program students are compared with district and state TAAS results for the three-year period.

Figure 1: Percent Achieving Mastery on Exit-Level TAAS Reading for the DELTA Program Only, the District, and the State, 1996-99

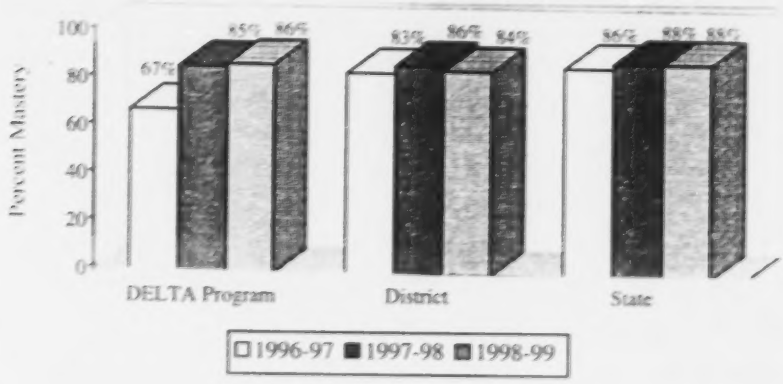

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Figure 2: Percent Achieving Mastery on Exit-Level TAAS Writing for the DELTA Program Only, the District, and the State, 1996-99

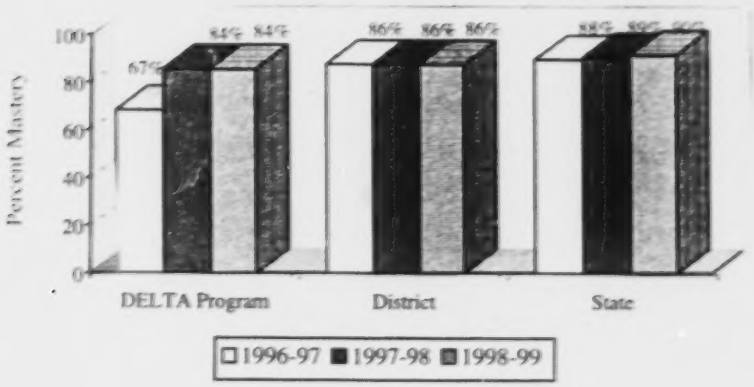
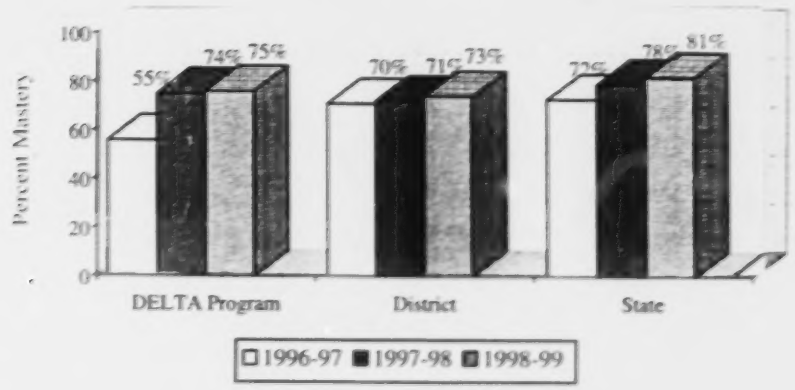


Figure 3: Percent Achieving Mastery on Exit-Level TAAS Math for the DELTA Program Only, the District, and the State, 1996-99



- For the three-year period, mastery rates for the reading subtest scores on the exit-level TAAS increased by 19 percentage points for students in the DELTA program, while mastery rates increased by one percentage point for the district and two points for the state during the same period.
- In 1998-99, the percentage of DELTA program students achieving mastery on the exit-level TAAS reading subtest was slightly greater than the district average, and trailed the state average by only two points.
- For the three-year period, mastery rates for DELTA program students on the exit-level TAAS writing increased 17 percentage points; district rates were unchanged, and state rates increased by one percentage point.
- In 1998-99, the percentage of DELTA program students achieving mastery on the exit-level writing subtest for DELTA program students trailed the district average by only two points and the state average by six points.

- For the three-year period, mastery rates for DELTA program students for exit-level TAAS math increased 20 percentage points during the period, while district and state math subtest mastery rates have risen three and nine percentage points, respectively.
- For the second consecutive year, the percentage of DELTA students achieving mastery on exit-level math surpassed that of the district.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Results over the past three years of implementation show a general increase in the number of students served by the DELTA program, although the number of students served at some campuses decreased for the 1998-99 school year. This decrease coincides with the first full year of operation of Garza Independence High School, the district's alternative high school, and likely is due in some part to target population students being served by this campus. The number of prevented dropouts served has also increased each year. Along with the increase in the number of students served came a slight decrease in the average and total number of credits earned for the total population. During the past three years of implementation, however, the program has served increasing numbers of seniors who need fewer credits than other students in order to graduate.

A number of issues arose in the course of this year's evaluation with regard to data integrity. Throughout the year, campus lab managers maintained local databases of students served. Lab managers received student data from several campus sources. These data were reported at the end of each six-weeks grading period and were reviewed for accuracy. Errors were reported particularly with student identification numbers to the lab managers as well as the program coordinator. As stated previously, the totals and percentages reported here are less than fully accurate due to erroneous student identification numbers being reported by the campuses. During the 1998-99 school year, the program coordinator helped ensure that data were reported to the evaluator in a timely manner and that necessary data corrections were made. However, the DELTA program coordinator position was eliminated from the district's 1999-2000 budget. Additionally, this is the final year that the district's Office of Program Evaluation will produce the DELTA program evaluation report.

The findings of this evaluation indicate that the DELTA program is successfully meeting the goals of serving the target population and helping recovered and prevented dropouts stay in school and earn high school diplomas. Recommendations are:

- for the program to continue and to continue to serve the targeted population;
- for the campus lab directors to continue to vary lab schedules in order to accommodate as many students as possible;
- for the program to be centrally coordinated to ensure timeliness and accuracy of data collected at the campus level and to facilitate effective communication with campuses regarding program policies and procedures;
- for data collection methods to be improved; and,
- for the scope of the program's evaluation to be expanded to include measures such as program cost and post-program outcomes for graduates and non-graduates.

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